

Question #1

Vision in Student Athletes (VISA) is a guidance and counseling psycho-educational program for boys that was developed in response to the compelling research and statistics done by Dr. William Pollack from Harvard Medical School; Dr. James Dobson from Focus on the Family; and Michael Gurian, a noted therapist, educator, and author. Vision in Student Athletes is a proactive approach that addresses the social and emotional aspects of adolescent development and also the academic needs of teenage boys. The boys meet regularly as a group with two counselors and a designated athletic coach. During group sessions, lessons and activities are planned and facilitated by the faculty to simulate life situations and to determine appropriate reactions. Sessions are developed from various texts that promote group activities. Such resources are easily accessible to the general public.

The extensive research from the above authorities strongly suggests that males sense greater pressures to perform academically, socially, and athletically, and often do not have the network or the skills to successfully maneuver their way through these challenges. The male student athlete is part of a teenage population that faces some of the greatest anxieties, stresses, and pressures. While young girls face the same pressures, research shows them to be more adept at handling stressful situations. In addition the research further indicates that teenage females have a much stronger emotional support network. Therefore, VISA's main purpose is to provide an academic as well as an emotional and social support system where young boys may flourish apart from cultural and stereotypical demands. VISA encourages young males to plan for the future by making the most of the present opportunities available to them. The majority of students who participate in VISA have demonstrated academic growth across the curriculum and have attended either a two or four year college.

Objectives for VISA

1. To develop time management skills that will help students better control their present life situations and to establish performance plans that focus on academic improvement as well as social and personal expectations and aspirations.
2. To assist students in developing coping and anger management skills.
3. To set forth role models who will demonstrate appropriate qualities of manhood such as honor, compassion, respect, responsibility, and courage.
4. To establish an atmosphere where young males can freely discuss peer pressures and performance stressors without feeling inept or inadequate to social standards.
5. To guide the students as they use a template for the creation of a career plan and a personal mission statement.
6. To explore the college options and to ascertain the requirements for those careers by establishing opportunities for open dialogue between the high school students and the college athletes.
7. To expose students to the college environment by speaking with admissions counselors and touring various college campuses.
8. To encourage socially acceptable behaviors in the classroom and on the athletic arena.

Question #2

The VISA program focuses on Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards and Core Content Standards. The sample lesson below reinforces the standard elements identified.

1. Interpersonal Skills-working to accomplish a team goal in a culturally diverse group (Standards 4, 3.1, 3.2)
2. Basic Skills-reading, writing, speaking and listening (Standards 1,2,3,4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3)
3. Personal Qualities-individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, integrity, and honesty (Standard 4)
4. Thinking Skills-critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving (Standards 2, 3, 3.2, 3.3)

This sample lesson was done in September and taken from a national best selling book, The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Teens by Sean Covey. The lesson's purpose was to establish the importance of having a future vision in order to be successful in the present and beyond. A short dialogue between two literary characters from Alice in Wonderland was read, and the students were asked to share what they thought the following line meant, "If you don't know where you are going, then it doesn't matter which way you walk." The students concluded that you need a destination before you start to ask for directions.

After the discussion the students were given pieces of a jigsaw puzzle but no picture to follow. The students were asked to do the best they could to complete the puzzle. As facilitators, we watched the small groups attempt to complete the task and verbally observed their frustrated behaviors with the groups with statements such as, "Frank, you seem frustrated with the assignment. What do you think is the problem?" Finally, one of the students stated, "It would be easier if we knew what this looked like." At that time, we produced the cover of the puzzle and the students were able to successfully put the pieces together. Once again, we asked the students to think how their future and the puzzle activity were related. The students concluded that with the picture they could easily put the puzzle together and so with a picture of their future they would be able to plan better now.

Then students were given a list of questions to answer that would help them visualize the person they wanted to be when they were twenty-two years of age. From their own visualization of the future, the students were asked to write a mission statement for themselves and to begin to make a list of goals for current the school year that included academic, social, and athletic performance behaviors.

Question #3

Data and statistics were compiled by sources that include the following: A Fine Young Man, by Michael Gurian, Lost Boys and Real Boys by Dr. Pollack, a professor at Harvard Medical School, from the Chronicle of Higher Education: Where have All the Men Gone?, from Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, and Centers for disease Control and Prevention.

Adolescent boys today are harming themselves and others in their communities more than other generations before them. More than ever before, young males lack role models. Very few dominant caregivers are male. The types of role models offered for young boys are often limited to stereotypes that do not demonstrate qualities such as honor, compassion, responsibility, respect, and courage. And few, if any, discuss the importance of pursuing higher learning before setting out in search of fame and glory. Family and community systems have been replaced with vague cultural signals and media characters that offer no substance or personal connection. These grim statistics support the creation of psycho-educational groups that will address the needs of male adolescents. "The information necessary to create a male is encoded in our DNA, but it takes all the institutions of a culture to produce a man." Sandor McNab (p. 61 A Fine Young Man)

1. Adolescent males significantly outnumber females in diagnoses of most conduct disorders, thought disorders, learning disabilities, and brain disorders.
2. The majority of adolescent alcoholics and drug addicts are male.
3. ADHD is almost exclusively a male malady.
4. Adolescent males are four times more likely than females to commit suicide.
5. Adolescent boys drop out of high school at four times the rate of adolescent girls.
6. Ninety percent of discipline problems in school are male, as are most expulsions and suspensions.
7. The majority of salutatorians and valedictorians are females.
8. Very few males are involved in school clubs or student government.
9. Boys finish their education less frequently.
10. Boys finish their education with lower than average grades.
11. Fewer males go on to college.

The following measures assist the group facilitators in the assessment process:

1. Interim Reports-fewer "in danger of failing" comments marked in core courses.
2. Report Cards-improvement of grades from marking period to marking period.
3. Teacher evaluations-less negative comments regarding behavior, work quality, and attitude.
4. End of the year GPA and class rank-increases in GPA and rank.
5. Discipline Referral Cards-reduced number of In-School and Out of School Suspensions.
6. Post high school plans-Students who participate in Visa apply and are accepted into higher education programs.

Question #4

This program is not difficult to develop because the resource texts, the high school faculty, and the college admissions offices are easily accessible. Two counselors and an athletic coach should be the facilitators. Prior to setting up the program, it is essential that the books by Michael Gurain and Dr. Pollack be read by everyone involved in the program. These texts provide essential information that can help form the foundation for a VISA program. From the information in these resources and a student needs assessment, the advisors will be able to custom design specific objectives for the program. The advisors, then, should set up a meeting with the athletic director. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the advisors need to share the information that has been gathered. The director's input is essential for the program, so that would be the second purpose for the meeting. During the meeting, the advisors should also discuss the when, where, and how of the recommendation process. A VISA group should be limited to twenty students and made up of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Finally, it is essential to clarify whether the director or the advisors will be making the presentation to the coaches.

Once these details are in place, the resources listed below should be reviewed to develop lessons and group activities. Then contact should be made with colleges and their athletic departments to plan group interview and tours. The resources listed below are a sampling of what is available. They can be purchased at most book stores. These books can also serve as resources for other groups that may be available at a school.

A Fine Young Man by Michael Guirian

Real Boys by Dr. William Pollack

Joining Together by David W. Johnson & Frank P. Johnson

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey

Reaching Out by David W. Johnson

College Admissions for the High School Athlete by Jack DiSalvo & Theresa Foy DiCeronimo

Student Athletes : Shattering the Myths & Sharing the Realities edited by Wyatt D. Kirk & Sarah V. Kirk

Life's Playbook for Success by Verizon (see www.lifesplaybook.com for additional information)

Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills & Self-Esteem by Siriana S. Khalsa

Life Lessons for Young Adolescents, An Advisory Guide for Teachers by Fred Schrumpf, Sharon Freiburg, David Skadden

How To Create Positive Relationships with Students by Michelle Karns

Conflict Resolution Activities for the Secondary Student by Ruth Perlstein and Gloria Thrall

Advising Student Athletes Through the College Recruiting Process by Michael d. Kohler

The success of the VISA program is possible through the cooperation and communication between faculty and students. The latter are the true beneficiaries in their social and academic endeavors.